

The Church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus in Constantinople and the Monophysite Refugees

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When Cyril Mango first attempted to elucidate the circumstances surrounding the construction of the church dedicated to Sts. Sergius and Bacchus in the palace of Hormisdas in Constantinople, his proposed scenario raised objections from Richard Krautheimer and Thomas F. Mathews, to which Mango felt compelled to reply.¹ I would not have ventured to address this controversial topic yet again, were it not for the emergence of some new evidence.

The church (now Küçük Ayasofya Camii) is located on the south side of the city, beneath the towering substructures of the curved end of the Hippodrome, just inside the sea walls along the shores of the Marmara.² Today, the railway from Sirkeci Station runs in the narrow gap between the church's south wall and the fortifications. Procopius indicates that the church stood within the palace of Hormisdas and that this palace had been the residence of Justinian and Theodora in the years before they ascended the throne in 527.³ Letters were written to Pope Hormisdas on 29 June 519, stating that Justinian had built (or perhaps, in truth, begun to build) a church of Sts. Peter and Paul in the palace of Hormisdas, and requesting relics of the two apostles and of St. Lawrence in order that they might be deposited there.⁴ Justinian supported Chalcedonian orthodoxy and had

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¹See C. Mango, "The Church of Saints Sergius and Bacchus at Constantinople and the Alleged Tradition of Octagonal Palatine Churches," *JÖB* 21 (1972): 189–93; R. Krautheimer, "Again Saints Sergius and Bacchus at Constantinople," *JÖB* 23 (1974): 251–53; T. F. Mathews, "Architecture et liturgie dans les premières églises palatiales de Constantinople," *Revue de l'art* 24 (1974): 22–29; C. Mango, "The Church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus Once Again," *BZ* 68 (1975): 385–92. Mango's "Tradition" and "Once Again" are reprinted in C. Mango, *Studies on Constantinople* (Aldershot, 1993).

²On the church, see W. Müller-Wiener, *Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbuls* (Tübingen, 1977), 177–83, fig. 358; T. F. Mathews, *The Byzantine Churches of Istanbul: A Photographic Survey* (University Park, Pa.–London 1976), 242–59; P. Grossmann, "Beobachtungen zum ursprünglichen Grundriß der Sergios- und Bakchoskirche in Konstantinopel," *IstMitt* 39 (1989): 153–59.

³Procopius, *Buildings*, 1.4.1–8, ed. O. Veh, *Prokop: Werke*, vol. 5 (Munich, 1977); trans. H. B. Dewing and G. Downey, *Procopius*, vol. 7 (London, 1940).

⁴For details of Sts. Peter and Paul, see Mango, "Tradition," 189–90; and A. A. Vasiliev, *Justin the First: An Introduction to the Epoch of Justinian the Great* (Cambridge, Mass., 1950), 377–78.

written earlier letters to the pope helping negotiate an end to the Acacian schism.⁵ It is, therefore, not unlikely that it was Justin I's reconciliation with the papacy (achieved on 31 March 519) that motivated his nephew to build the new church.⁶ Justinian was made co-emperor with his uncle on 1 April 527; when the latter died exactly four months later, he became sole ruler, his wife was proclaimed augusta, and the imperial couple moved from the palace of Hormisdas into the Great Palace.⁷

Procopius explains that Sts. Sergius and Bacchus was built by Justinian alongside the earlier church of Sts. Peter and Paul, and he says that the two edifices were of similar size and shared the same atrium.⁸ The dedicatory inscription carved around the nave of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus is worth quoting in full:

Other sovereigns have honoured dead men whose labour was unprofitable, but our sceptered Justinian, fostering piety, honours with a splendid abode the Servant of Christ, Begetter of all things, Sergius; whom not the burning breath of fire, nor the sword, nor any other constraint of torments disturbed; but who endured to be slain for the sake of Christ, the God, gaining by his blood heaven as his home. May he in all things guard the rule of the sleepless sovereign and increase the power of the God-crowned Theodora whose mind is adorned with piety, whose constant toil lies in unsparing efforts to nourish the destitute.⁹

The references to "our sceptered Justinian" and "God-crowned Theodora" indicate that the text was composed and inscribed in or after 527, the year in which the couple ascended the throne. Even if the capitals that support the inscribed entablature had been stockpiled or salvaged from an earlier structure (unlikely suggestions), the monograms on them, which are to be resolved as IOYCTINIANOY, BACIAEΩC, and ΘEOΔΩPAC, provide the same *terminus post quem*.¹⁰

The monograms might also be adduced as evidence in favor of a *terminus ante quem* in 532. Those of Justinian and Theodora are of the box type (otherwise known as the block, square, or double-bar type), being constructed around a letter with two uprights (N in IOYCTINIANOY) or around two letters, each with a single upright (E and P in ΘEOΔΩPAC). The cruciform style of monogram was a later development, which had not been introduced by 518.¹¹ The absence of any cruciform monograms of Theodora on the

⁵Vasiliev, *Justin the First*, 179–83, 199.

⁶Vasiliev, *Justin the First*, 378; W. Dynes, "The First Christian Palace-Church Type," *Marsyas* 11 (1964): 6.

⁷See *PLRE*, II, 648–51 ("Iustinus 4"), 645–48 ("Iustinianus 7"); *PLRE*, III, 1240–41 ("Theodore 1").

⁸Procopius, *Buildings*, 1.4.1–8.

⁹Translation from Mango, "Tradition," 190. For the Greek, see, e.g., A. van Millingen, *Byzantine Churches in Constantinople: Their History and Architecture* (London, 1912), fig. 20 (by A. E. Henderson); S. G. Mercati, "Epigraphica," *Atti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia*, ser. 3, *Rendiconti* 3 (1925): 197–205.

¹⁰For the monograms, see H. Swainson, "Monograms of the Capitals of S. Sergius at Constantinople," *BZ* 4 (1895): 106–8.

¹¹The sculpture and brickstamps from St. Polyeuktos lack cruciform monograms. For the monograms, see R. M. Harrison, *Excavations at Sarāḡhane in Istanbul*, vol. 1 (Princeton, 1986), 162, fig. L; M. J. Vickers, "A 'New' Capital from St. Polyeuktos (Sarāḡhane) in Venice," *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 8 (1989): 228, fig. 2; and S. J. Hill, "The Brickstamps," in Harrison, *Excavations*, 1:213, fig. B (B11, B28); 216, fig. C (C11, C13–C16). I will demonstrate elsewhere that the superstructures of the church of St. Polyeuktos were built using stamped bricks manufactured in and after 518, which is, therefore, the *terminus post quem* for the construction of the upper parts. E. Weigand, "Ein bisher verkanntes Diptychon Symmachorum," *JDAI* 52 (1937): 130, placed the introduction of the cruciform monogram "zwischen 530 und 540" but lacked firm evidence for a *terminus post quem*. Such evidence now comes from the St. Polyeuktos excavations.

group of capitals used in Sts. Sergius and Bacchus may indicate that the type (or at least Theodora's monogram of that type) had not appeared even by 527. In the churches of Hagia Eirene, Hagia Sophia (both ca. 532–537), and St. John at Ephesus (535/6–541),¹² cruciform monograms of the empress are employed, either alone or in combination with her box monograms.¹³ The evidence might, therefore, be taken to indicate that the capitals in Sts. Sergius and Bacchus had been carved after Theodora's accession in 527 but somewhat before the designs for the capitals in Hagia Eirene and Hagia Sophia had been prepared, ca. 533.¹⁴ Furthermore, no monogram of ΑΥΤΟΥΚΤΑ occurs on the capitals, although it does appear in both Hagia Eirene and Hagia Sophia, and this is perhaps another indication that the capitals were carved before ca. 533.¹⁵ These are, of course, arguments from silence, and there may be other explanations: the sculptors were unfamiliar with the most up-to-date imperial monograms, or the capitals were old stock or spoils taken from elsewhere. A *terminus ante quem* in 536 is firmer, since the acts of the council held in May and June of that year were signed by one Paul, "the presbyter and abbot of the holy apostles Sts. Peter and Paul and of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus in the palace of Hormisdas."¹⁶

Unfortunately, the five brickstamps that have so far been published are not helpful in clarifying the church's date. The two types of rosette that Ernest Mamboury and Cyril Mango ascribed to the sixth century belong, in fact, to the Turkish period, being stamped on hexagonal tiles used to relay the floor in the gallery.¹⁷ The three other ex-

¹²For the date, see C. Foss, *Ephesus after Antiquity: A Late Antique, Byzantine and Turkish City* (Cambridge, 1979), 88 n. 88.

¹³See W. S. George, *The Church of St. Eirene at Constantinople* (London, 1912), fig. 7, pl. 16 (Hagia Eirene); C. G. Curtis and S. Aristarches, "Ανέκδοτοι 'Επιγραφαί Βυζαντίου," 'Ο ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει 'Ελληνικός Φιλολογικός Σύλλογος, archaeological suppl. to vol. 16 (1885): 13–15 (Hagia Sophia); E. M. Antoniadès, 'Εκφρασις τῆς Ἀγίας Σοφίας, vol. 2 (Athens, 1908), 23, 29, 31, 34, 35, 68, 69, 205, 209, 213, 225, 231, 232, 236, 297, 309, 326, 335, 343, 356 (Hagia Sophia); H. Vettters, ed., *Die Inschriften von Ephesos: Inschriften griechischer Städte aus Kleinasien* 17.2, VII.2 (Bonn, 1981), no. 4363 (St. John at Ephesus).

¹⁴Curtis and Aristarches, "Ανέκδοτοι 'Επιγραφαί Βυζαντίου," 15, pl. 3, no. 8, suggest that the monogram on a capital in the southwest exedra at ground-floor level in Hagia Sophia gives the date A.M. 6042. The interpretation is doubtful, but if correct it would suggest that construction had reached the first storey by 533/4. See also C. G. Curtis, *Broken Bits of Byzantium*, pt. 2 (n.p., 1891), no. 15; W. R. Lethaby and H. Swainson, *The Church of Sancta Sophia Constantinople* (London–New York, 1894), 296; Antoniadès, 'Εκφρασις τῆς Ἀγίας Σοφίας, 2:29; H. Kähler, *Hagia Sophia*, trans. E. Childs (New York–Washington, D.C., 1967), 14 with pl. 75; R. J. Mainstone, *Hagia Sophia: Architecture, Structure and Liturgy of Justinian's Great Church* (London, 1988), 185. C. Foss, "Three Apparent Early Examples of the Era of Creation," *ZPapEpig* 31 (1978): 241–46, does not discuss this capital.

¹⁵Swainson, "Monograms," 107, took the absence of the ΑΥΤΟΥΚΤΑ monogram to indicate that the church was built before Theodora became augusta. But this is impossible, since the entablature inscription and monograms of ΒΑCΙΑΕΩC clearly indicate that the church was built after Justinian had become emperor, and Theodora is known to have become augusta on the same day that she and her husband were crowned. T. Mathews, *The Early Churches of Constantinople: Architecture and Liturgy* (University Park, Pa., 1971), 47, misrepresents Swainson's argument, stating; "Theodora is not named in the monograms."

¹⁶Mango, "Tradition," 191; Krautheimer, "Again," 253; Mango, "Once Again," 385–86. For Paul's signatures, see *ACO*, ed. Schwartz, vol. 3 (Berlin, 1940), 46 no. 34, 129 no. 54, 144 no. 56, 158 no. 54, 164 no. 54, 173 no. 59. In no. 34, Paul styles himself πρεσβύτερος καὶ ἡγούμενος τῶν ἀγίων Πέτρου καὶ Παύλου τῶν ἀποστόλων, Σεργίου καὶ Βάκχου τῶν μαρτύρων.

¹⁷See E. Mamboury, "Les briques byzantines marquées du chrisme," *Annuaire de l'institut de philologie et d'histoire orientales* 9 (1949): 449–62 (where nos. 16 and 17, in fact, represent the same stamp); C. Mango, "Byzantine Brick Stamps," *AJA* 54 (1950): 19–27, fig. 1 (where the two different types are shown). The

amples, although certainly sixth century, cannot at present be dated with greater precision.¹⁸ We will require a larger sample of material that can be said with certainty to come from the Justinianic fabric of the church, if brickstamps are to clarify matters.¹⁹

Thus, the capitals were designed, and the inscription composed, in the period 527–536, possibly between 527 and 533. Mango suggested that the epithet “sleepless,” which is used to describe Justinian in the entablature inscription, reflected the emperor’s reputation, known from Procopius and John Lydus, for working late into the night.²⁰ He deduced that “the inscription was composed at a time when Justinian’s nocturnal habits had achieved some notoriety,”²¹ therefore probably several years after his accession in 527. The same might also be argued on the basis of the description of Theodora’s “unsparing efforts to nourish the destitute.” It is, however, unclear whether these claims have some historical basis or are merely conventional topoi. Certainly, the inscription contains standard themes. The descriptions of Theodora’s mind as “adorned with piety” (εὐσεβίη φαιδρύνεται) and of Justinian as “fostering piety” (εὐσεβίην . . . ἀέξων) recall references in the dedicatory inscription of St. Polyeuktos to Anicia Juliana’s mind “full of piety” (εὐσεβίης πλήθουσας)²² and to her “heeding piety” (εὐσεβίης ἀλέγουσα).²³ The invocation of St. Sergius to guard Justinian’s rule and to increase Theodora’s power is reminiscent of Juliana’s invocation of all the saints to whom she had dedicated churches to protect her, her son, and his daughters.²⁴ However, it is less clear whether the more specific references to Justinian’s sleeplessness and to Theodora’s care for the destitute are equally traditional themes.

Since the emperor and empress would have moved from the palace of Hormisdas into the Great Palace upon their accession in 527, it is not certain why they chose to locate a magnificent new church in their former residence, where Justinian had built a basilica in honor of the Apostles Peter and Paul only a few years earlier (ca. 519). Krautheimer proposed that the location of the church might be explained by the fact

Turkish date of the hexagonal tiles is noted, e.g., by George, *The Church of St. Eirene*, 62. See also S. Eyice, “Osmanlı devri Türk yapı sanatında damgalı tuğlalar,” *Sanat Tarihi Yıllığı* 9–10 (1979–80): 155–62.

¹⁸See I. P. Meliopoulos, “Ἐξακρίβωσις ἀρχαίων τοποθεσιῶν,” *Ὁ ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει Ἑλληνικὸς Φιλολογικὸς Σύλλογος* 29 (1907): 222–31, 231, section Γ’, nos. 1–2; van Millingen, *Byzantine Churches in Constantinople*, 79, no. 1 (mentioned earlier by E. M. Antoniadēs, *Ἐκφρασις τῆς Ἀγίας Σοφίας*, vol. 1 [Athens, 1907], 83 n. 36). The 6th-century stamp bearing the twelfth indiction published by Meliopoulos could conceivably refer to the period from 1 September 533 to 31 August 534, but we cannot be sure that the brick was found in the fabric of the church, nor that it was new when it was used.

¹⁹The only other evidence that might be adduced to date the church is a confused passage in the unreliable *Patria*, 3.39, *Scriptores originum Constantinopolitanarum*, ed. T. Preger, vol. 2 (Leipzig, 1907), 231–32, with G. Dagron, *Constantinople imaginaire* (Paris, 1984), 320–21.

²⁰See Procopius, *Secret History*, 12.20, 12.27, 13.28, ed. Veh, vol. 1 (Munich, 1981); trans. H. B. Dewing, *Procopius*, vol. 6 (London, 1935); Procopius, *Buildings*, 1.7.8–9; John Lydus, *De Magistratibus*, 3.55, ed. R. Wünsch, *Ioannis Lydi De Magistratibus* (Leipzig, 1903), trans. A. C. Bandy, *On the Powers or the Magistracies of the Roman State* (Philadelphia, 1983).

²¹Mango, “Tradition,” 190; idem, “Once Again,” 388–89.

²²*Palatine Anthology*, 1.10.25–26, ed. H. Stadtmueller, *Anthologia Graeca*, vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1894), trans. W. R. Paton, *The Greek Anthology*, vol. 1 (London–New York, 1927).

²³*Palatine Anthology*, 1.10.16.

²⁴*Palatine Anthology*, 1.10.37–39. For similar comparisons between these epigrams, see C. L. Connor, “The Epigram in the Church of Hagios Polyeuktos in Constantinople and Its Byzantine Response,” *Byzantion* 69 (1999): 511–12.

that the foundations had been laid shortly before Justinian and Theodora ascended the throne. However that may be, the two churches in the palace of Hormisdas would not have been easily accessible to the imperial couple until a connection had been established between the palace of Hormisdas and the Great Palace, and this work does not appear to have been undertaken until after 532.²⁵

Mango, besides being concerned about the location chosen for the church, wondered why the imperial couple had decided to dedicate it to Sts. Sergius and Bacchus.²⁶ He proposed that explanations for both the location and dedication were to be found in John of Ephesus' *Lives of the Eastern Saints*. It is recorded there that the empress Theodora accommodated a community of over five hundred Monophysite refugees within the great halls (*triklinoi*) of the palace of Hormisdas,²⁷ and Mango suggested that the church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus had been built for their use. First, he observed that the entablature inscription refers to Theodora, "whose constant toil lies in unsparing efforts to nourish the destitute," and suggested that this could be taken to refer to the shelter afforded the persecuted Monophysites.²⁸ Second, John of Ephesus states that in one of the great halls in which the Monophysites were lodged was a "martyrium,"²⁹ which Mango asserted must refer to the church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus itself.³⁰

The inscription's reference to Theodora's charitable works need not refer specifically to the Monophysite refugees, and Krautheimer dismissed it as a mere topos.³¹ Furthermore, there is no conclusive proof that John of Ephesus' martyrium is the church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus—and Krautheimer even made the implausible suggestion that the Syriac word rendered "martyrium" in Brooks's translation (*bēth sāhdē*) was simply a "reliquary" or "relic."³² Despite the lack of corroborative evidence, however, it must be admitted that Mango's theory provides a particularly good explanation for the location of the church in the palace of Hormisdas. Additionally, since John of Ephesus tells us that the refugees came from Syria, Armenia, Cappadocia and Cilicia, Isauria and Lycania, Asia, Alexandria, and Constantinople,³³ the hypothesis also provides a possible explanation for the dedication of the church to St. Sergius, to whom only one other church in Constantinople was dedicated³⁴ but who was greatly revered in Syria.³⁵

²⁵ Procopius, *Buildings*, 1.4.1–2 (probably written ca. 554) states that the connection was made when Justinian became emperor. However, a Syriac account of the conversations held in the palace of Hormisdas in 532 suggests that the connection was established shortly after the discussions: see S. Brock, "The Conversations with the Syrian Orthodox under Justinian (532)," *OCP* 47 (1981): 92 with n. 17.

²⁶ Mango, "Tradition," 191; idem, "Once Again," 388. It may be noted that only Sergius is mentioned in the dedicatory inscription.

²⁷ The relevant part of the Syriac text is edited with an English translation in "John of Ephesus: Lives of the Eastern Saints," trans. E. W. Brooks, *PO* 18 (1924): 600, 676–84.

²⁸ Mango, "Tradition," 191.

²⁹ Brooks, "Ephesus," 682.

³⁰ Mango, "Tradition," 192.

³¹ Krautheimer, "Again," 253.

³² *Ibid.*, 252.

³³ Brooks, "Ephesus," 677.

³⁴ For the church, which was near the cistern of Aetius, see R. Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'Empire byzantin*, vol. 1, *Le siège de Constantinople et le patriarcat oecuménique*, pt. 3, *Les églises et les monastères*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1969), 454.

³⁵ On the cult of St. Sergius in Syria and Mesopotamia, see E. K. Fowden, *The Barbarian Plain: Saint Sergius Between Rome and Iran* (Berkeley–Los Angeles–London, 1999).

Krautheimer raised a number of more or less serious objections to Mango's position. In Krautheimer's opinion, the refugees would have arrived in Constantinople only after the council of 536 at which Monophysitism was condemned, hence after the church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus had been built. Furthermore, he argued that it was unlikely that such a fine church would have been constructed for refugees.³⁶ The first objection is not serious, since persecution began in the East as early as 521, ceasing only during the peaceful negotiations of 530–536.³⁷ Thus, Theodora might have begun to provide shelter for persecuted monks from the time of her accession in 527.³⁸ Krautheimer's second criticism, however, was tacitly accepted by Mango, who shifted his argument somewhat, asserting in a later article: "The fact that the Monophysites were lodged at such a smart address shows that this [construction] happened when they were being courted rather than when they were being persecuted."³⁹ It must indeed be admitted that the détente between 530 and 536 would have been the most likely period for the imperial couple to have built a church for the use of a Monophysite community. According to Elias' *Life of John, Bishop of Tella*, a delegation of Monophysite monks arrived in Constantinople in 531,⁴⁰ and we first hear of the Monophysites' association with the palace of Hormisdas in 532, when discussions between Monophysite and Orthodox bishops were held in the heptaconch triclinium of the palace.⁴¹ Mango suggested that the church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus was built for these visiting Monophysite dignitaries and that construction would have been started around 531, making the church a contemporary of Hagia Sophia.⁴² The Monophysite refugees—who would have established themselves in the palace of Hormisdas between 527 and 530—must also have had access to the church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus, Mango argued, since John of Ephesus refers to their martyrdom in that palace and since Theodora's care for the persecuted monks is proclaimed in the entablature inscription.

Another of Krautheimer's objections to Mango's thesis rested upon the signature of the abbot Paul on the acts of the anti-Monophysite council of 536. From this evidence, Krautheimer deduced that Paul was the abbot of an Orthodox monastery that had nothing whatsoever to do with the community of Monophysites assembled elsewhere in the palace of Hormisdas. Krautheimer suggested that Paul would have ensured that the Monophysites were kept well away from his churches of Sts. Peter and Paul and Sts. Sergius and Bacchus.⁴³ In response, Mango plausibly countered that Paul might have been a Monophysite abbot who changed sides in 536, either willingly or under pres-

³⁶ Krautheimer, "Again," 252: "it seems to me unlikely that a structure that permanent and splendid was built for a refugee camp."

³⁷ See W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement* (Cambridge, 1972), 247, 260–63, 273–75; J. J. van Ginkel, "John of Ephesus: A Monophysite Historian in Sixth-Century Byzantium" (Ph.D. diss., Groningen, 1995), 27–29, 168–69.

³⁸ Mango, "Tradition," 192 n. 10, considered that the refugees may have begun to arrive in Constantinople as early as 527. In "Once Again," 386, Mango was prepared to push the arrival of the refugees back only as far as 531.

³⁹ Mango, "Once Again," 392.

⁴⁰ Trans. E. W. Brooks, *CSCO, Scriptores Syri*, ser. 3, vol. 25 *versio* (Leipzig, 1907), 39.

⁴¹ ACO, ed. Schwartz, vol. 4.2 (Berlin, 1914), 169. That the discussions took place in the palace of Hormisdas is confirmed by an independent Syriac account: see Brock, "Conversations," 92.

⁴² Mango, "Once Again," 392.

⁴³ Krautheimer, "Again," 252–53.

sure.⁴⁴ It must be admitted, however, that his alternative suggestion that an Orthodox abbot might have been appointed to lead the refugee community when persecution resumed in 536 seems much less likely.⁴⁵

It is certainly possible that the abbot Paul was the head of the Monophysite community: John of Ephesus states that the refugees in one great hall of the palace of Hormisdas “had as it were the organization of one convent and one service, and an archimandrite and a steward, and servitors and a table together, and were continually governed according to the whole perfect organization of a convent.”⁴⁶ In fact, the same author provides further information that may best be explained by linking the abbot Paul with the Monophysite monastery in the palace of Hormisdas. John records that sometime after Theodora’s death in 548, Orthodox opponents of the Monophysites attempted to sully the community’s reputation:

And while a few of the holy men were in these cells, the adversaries introduced some women with their husbands, and others who were not chaste . . . and whereas these men thought to defile the saints’ dwelling [i.e., the Monophysite accommodation], God purified it by a sudden fire, in that fire fell and burnt the whole of that place, only a small portion of it escaping. . . . And so at last it was given to the martyrs’ chapel of the holy Mar Sergius [i.e., the church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus], and a monastery was built on that spot and it remains to the present time to the glory of God.⁴⁷

Justinian, respecting the request of his late wife that the Monophysite community should be preserved,⁴⁸ then moved it to another imperial property, the house of Urbicius.⁴⁹ Thus, according to John of Ephesus’ account, many of the halls of the palace of Hormisdas that had been home to the Monophysite refugees were destroyed in a fire sometime after 548 and before 565/6 (when John was writing).⁵⁰ The church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus survived the conflagration and was given the devastated ground nearby, on which a monastery was founded.⁵¹ This testimony, therefore, suggests that the church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus had no monastery proper before 548. How, then, do we explain that already in 536 one Paul could claim to be abbot of the monastery of Sts. Peter and Paul and Sts. Sergius and Bacchus? Mathews simply suggested that John of Ephesus’ information concerning the foundation of the monastery is unreliable,⁵² but this seems most unlikely given John’s first-hand knowledge of the refugee community.⁵³ It would seem reasonable to conclude that Paul was the head of the Monophysite monastic com-

⁴⁴Mango, “Once Again,” 389.

⁴⁵Ibid., 392.

⁴⁶Brooks, “Ephesus,” 678.

⁴⁷Ibid., 683–84.

⁴⁸Ibid., 680.

⁴⁹Ibid., 683.

⁵⁰For the date of composition, see *ibid.*, 680 n. 2, 681 n. 2, and E. W. Brooks, “Introduction,” in *PO* 17 (1923): iii–xv.

⁵¹This is perhaps the monastery to which Cedrenus, *Historiarum Compendium*, ed. I. Bekker, vol. 1 (Bonn, 1838), 642–43, refers as being for “famous men.”

⁵²Mathews, “Architecture,” 24.

⁵³On the date and location of John’s residence in Constantinople, see Brooks, “Introduction,” iv–vi. He became head of Constantinople’s Monophysite community after the death of Theodosius of Alexandria in 566, by which time it had been moved to the house of Urbicius. See van Ginkel, “John of Ephesus,” 32–33, 214.

munity housed in the halls of the palace of Hormisdas. If so, by 536, this community, which was not housed in a monastery proper, had apparently been granted access to both the churches of Sts. Peter and Paul and Sts. Sergius and Bacchus.

So far, so good. Unfortunately, however, there are two strong objections to Mango's suggestion that the church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus is to be identified with the martyrion described by John of Ephesus. Krautheimer rightly observed that the Monophysite accommodation appears to have been arranged in haste to cope with an emergency situation and that the monks, who are said to have erected altars everywhere in the halls of the palace of Hormisdas, do not appear to have had access to any church.⁵⁴ It may be added that John of Ephesus states explicitly that the martyrion was inside a *triklinos* and was clearly not a church in its own right but rather a chapel set up within a hall of the palace.⁵⁵ The second objection is decisive. John of Ephesus describes at some length the occasion on which the great hall containing the martyrion collapsed under the weight of the congregation.⁵⁶ The disaster was terrible, and the cries of hundreds of refugees were heard in the Great Palace, bringing the imperial couple to the scene. Mathews noted this passage and rightly concluded that since the church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus still stands today, it cannot be identified as the martyrion that collapsed.⁵⁷ Mango, although mentioning the disaster, did not address this serious objection in his reply.⁵⁸

On the basis of these two major objections, it would appear that we must conclude, along with Krautheimer and Mathews, that there is no demonstrable link between the church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus and the community of Monophysite refugees based in the halls of the palace of Hormisdas. One additional possibility, however, might answer these objections: a closer reading of John of Ephesus suggests that the surviving church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus may have been built to replace the hall whose collapse he describes. Crucially, John records that, after the disaster, Justinian "made the hall itself that fell an 'azgā'."⁵⁹ Brooks translates 'azgā as "portico," but it can also mean "arch," "vault," "vaulted roof," or "vaulted building."⁶⁰ That John could here be referring to the construction of a new building with a domed roof is demonstrated by the use of the same Syriac term in discussions of the vaulting of two sixth-century domed churches.⁶¹ Michael the Syrian describes the earthquake of 7 May 558, which caused a portion of the vaulting of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople to collapse. From other accounts of the disaster, it is clear that the "vault" to which Michael refers must be either the eastern part of the dome or the eastern semidome.⁶² Verse 8 of the inauguration anthem of Justinian's domed

⁵⁴Krautheimer, "Again," 252; Brooks, "Ephesus," 676–79, with descriptions of temporary cells and booths on 678 and reference to makeshift altars on 679.

⁵⁵Brooks, "Ephesus," 682.

⁵⁶Ibid., 681–82.

⁵⁷Mathews, "Architecture," 24: "visiblement, les moines officiaient ailleurs."

⁵⁸Mango, "Once Again," 386.

⁵⁹Brooks, "Ephesus," 683.

⁶⁰See R. Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1879), col. 104.

⁶¹I am extremely grateful to Sebastian Brock for providing, at my request, the parallel references referred to here, and for giving translations where unavailable or debatable (letter to the author of 2 December 1994).

⁶²Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle* 9.31, ed. J.-B. Chabot, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1901), 262, 320. Regarding this collapse, Paul the Silentiary reports: "but the curve of the eastern arch slipped off and a portion of the dome was mingled with dust: part of it lay on the floor, and part—a wonder to behold—hung in mid-air as if unsupported" (trans. C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312–1453* [Englewood

church of Hagia Sophia in Edessa states that “its entire ceiling (i.e., dome) is fastened on the vaults (*ʿazgē*),” but the description is unfortunately too vague to determine exactly which architectural elements (semidomes or squinches) are meant.⁶³ Given that the collapsed *triklinos* had been used as a martyrium, it is not unlikely that the vaulted structure built to replace it was a domed church.⁶⁴ We cannot, of course, be certain that this new vaulted building was the church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus that survives today; but, if we grant that it was, then we have a satisfactory explanation for the church’s location and dedication.⁶⁵

There is a further indication that the new, vaulted edifice was, in fact, a church, since John claims that it was constructed in thanks to God for the miraculous survival of all those involved in the disastrous collapse of the martyrium: “this story filled the king and queen and the magnates also, and the rest of the people throughout the city with astonishment, and called forth praise and thanksgiving to God, and rendered the community of the blessed men itself honourable in the eyes of everyone, so that at last the king sent, and made the hall itself that fell a vaulted building.”⁶⁶ There is undoubtedly some exaggeration here, and John’s claim that the community was “honourable in the eyes of everyone” might simply be taken to indicate that the events occurred during the détente of 530–536. But if we give credence to the story of the collapse itself and identify the vaulted building with Sts. Sergius and Bacchus, then it was primarily this disaster that motivated the construction of the church for the refugees’ use—although we may be sure that Justinian’s desire to court the Monophysite dignitaries who were then present in Constantinople explains the grandeur of the new edifice.

I conclude by summarizing the possible sequence of events. A community of Monophysite refugees was established by Theodora in the halls of the palace of Hormisdas after she and her husband had moved into the Great Palace in 527. According to John of Ephesus, this community was organized in the manner of a convent, with an archimandrite and stewards, and it employed one of the palace halls as a martyrium. His account makes no suggestion that the monks were granted access to the church of Sts. Peter and

Cliffs, N.J., 1972], 80–81). For other sources concerning this collapse, see C. Mango, “Byzantine Writers on the Fabric of Hagia Sophia,” in *Hagia Sophia from the Age of Justinian to the Present*, ed. R. Mark and A. H. Çakmak (Cambridge, 1992), 51–53.

⁶³See primarily K. E. McVey, “The Domed Church as Microcosm: Literary Roots of an Architectural Symbol,” *DOP* 37 (1983): 95; A. Palmer (with L. Rodley), “The Inauguration Anthem of Hagia Sophia in Edessa: A New Edition and Translation with Historical and Architectural Notes and a Comparison with a Contemporary Constantinopolitan Kontakion,” *BMGS* 12 (1988): 132, 160; K. E. McVey, “The Sogitha on the Church of Edessa in the Context of Other Early Greek and Syriac Hymns for the Consecration of Church Buildings,” *Aram* 5 (1993): 333, 357. The form of church at Edessa is unclear. I wonder whether it may have been an aisled tetraconch, similar to those at Seleucia-Pieria, Apamea, Bosra, or Rusafa. Verse 7 of the hymn would then refer to the four main arches that supported the dome, and verse 8 would speak of the semidomes that sprang backward from these arches, thus surrounding the dome “like crags jutting from a mountain.”

⁶⁴The *Life of Behnam and Sarah* mentions a martyrium made “in the form of small vaults (*ʿazgōnē*).” Syriac text in P. Bedjan, ed., *Acta martyrum et sanctorum*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1891), 432.

⁶⁵It remains to be determined whether the irregularities in the design of the church can be explained by the suggestion that it occupies the site of an earlier palatial hall, and whether anything of that palatial hall (of uncertain date) survives. It may also be worthwhile considering the possibility that the double-shell design was chosen by those for whom Sts. Sergius and Bacchus was built, since the plan of the church is closely related to those of the aisled tetraconchs of Syria, Jordan, and Palestine.

⁶⁶Brooks, “Ephesus,” 682–83, corrected.

Paul.⁶⁷ On one occasion, the hall that served as a martyrium collapsed, and the imperial couple determined to build a vaulted structure to replace it. This was presumably the church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus. The construction of such a grand building for a Monophysite community, and at imperial command, is most likely to have occurred during the peaceful negotiations of 530–536; the evidence of the monograms on the capitals might be used to argue for a date no later than ca. 533. Theodora's care for the refugee community, which had grown up during the preceding years of persecution, was proclaimed in the entablature inscription of the new church. The dedication of the church to Sergius was intended to appeal in particular to the refugees from the frontier regions of Syria and Mesopotamia, where the saint was most popular. By means of this and other gestures, Justinian and Theodora hoped to encourage them both to come to terms with their Orthodox opponents and to remain firm in their opposition to Persia.⁶⁸ By 536 one abbot is known to have overseen both Sts. Sergius and Bacchus and Sts. Peter and Paul, so the latter, too, was apparently available for use by the Monophysite monks. Perhaps it was during the construction of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus that the refugees had first been granted access to the adjoining church. The abbot in 536, one Paul, was forced to sign the acts of the anti-Monophysite council. At some point after 548, the halls containing the temporary monastic cells of the Monophysites were destroyed by fire, and the community was transferred to the house of Urbicius. Only then was a proper monastery founded for the churches of Sts. Peter and Paul and Sts. Sergius and Bacchus.

According to this interpretation of John of Ephesus' account, the church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus is not to be identified with the martyrium he describes but with the vaulted building that replaced it on the same site, and the church was built for a community of Monophysite refugees, not, as Krautheimer and Mathews held, for imperial use.⁶⁹ The alternative to this proposal is to conclude that the Monophysites who were lodged

⁶⁷Some monasteries in Mesopotamia and northern Syria consisted of a large, rectangular hall, to the side of which was attached a small room serving as an oratory. See, e.g., G. Tchalenko, *Villages antiques de la Syrie du nord*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1953), 178–81; G. Bell, *The Churches and Monasteries of the Tur 'Abdin* (London, 1982), 6–10, 10–13, 31–35, 35–38, 38–39; M. Mundell Mango, "Deux Églises de Mésopotamie du Nord: Ambar et Mar Abraham de Kashkar," *CahArch* 30 (1982): 47–70. I thank Marlia Mundell Mango for this observation.

⁶⁸See Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*, 130–33, who observes that Justinian and Theodora's alliance with St. Sergius was proclaimed not only by the construction of the church in Constantinople (possibly to house the relic of the saint's thumb, translated to Constantinople by Anastasius between 514 and 518) but also by sending a gift of a gem-encrusted gold cross to the saint's shrine in Rusafa between 527 and 540. I. Shahîd, "The Church of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus in Constantinople: Who Built It and Why?" *BSCAbstr* 22 (1996): 84, observes that St. Sergius was a Roman, a soldier, had probably fought the Persians, and was buried near the Persian border. He postulates that Justinian would have adopted the saint as a palladium during the Persian War of 527–532.

⁶⁹Mango's "Tradition" and "Once Again" were attempts not only to link the Monophysites with Sts. Sergius and Bacchus but also to discredit thereby the alleged tradition of building imperial palace-churches (i.e., churches built within a palace and used for the celebration of a specifically imperial ritual) on a double-shell plan (i.e., with a domed core and ambulatory). I preferred not to conflate the two issues here and have addressed only the former. Krautheimer was not convinced by Mango's arguments against the existence of the tradition (R. Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*, 4th ed., rev. R. Krautheimer and S. Ćurčić [Harmondsworth, 1986], 224 n. 22, and, in general on the postulated tradition, 76–78, esp. 76 n. 22). There can be no doubt that Sts. Sergius and Bacchus was built within the palace of Hormisdas and that this palace was connected (probably after 532) to the Great Palace by Justinian (see above, note 25). But if my hypothesis is accepted, the church was certainly not built for imperial use and, therefore, cannot be used to support whatever case there may be for a tradition of double-shell imperial palace-churches.

in the halls of the palace of Hormisdas had no link with the monastery of Sts. Peter and Paul and Sts. Sergius and Bacchus. But in that case, an explanation would have to be found for the existence of an Orthodox monastery of Sts. Peter and Paul and Sts. Sergius and Bacchus not far from a community of refugee Monophysite monks, and in a vacated imperial residence.

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